

Approved by the Select Board:

November 14, 2022

Select Board Meeting

Special Forum

Thursday, October 27, 2022

Hybrid Meeting

7:00 PM

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: November 21, 2022
TIME: 10:07 AM

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order by Chair Mark Paolillo. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Select Board member Roy Epstein were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin and Assistant Town Administrator/Finance Director Jennifer Hewitt.

Chair Paolillo announced that subject of the public forum will be to discuss the Article for Town Meeting that proposes to change the Town of Belmont's Treasurer position from an elected to an appointed position. The Select Board and the Warrant Committee voted unanimously to support the recommendation of the Collins Center to change the Treasurer position from elected to appointed. The 40-page Collins Center report is posted on the Town website and was distributed to all Town Meeting members.

Paolillo said that the current Treasurer, Floyd Carman, has managed this role effectively. The Treasurer position is a professional position that requires skill and experience and when Mr. Carman retires it may be difficult to find a Belmont resident to fill the position requirements.

Slides about the Collins Center report and recommendations were displayed on the screen.

Collins Center Report

- The report included 19 separate recommendations.
- Primary observation was that Belmont was one of the most decentralized municipal governments in Massachusetts. Decentralization affects the ability to manage financial needs.
- The strongest recommendation was that the elected Treasurer position in Belmont be changed to an appointed position.

Treasurer Role

- Issues bills
- Manages Taxpayer accounts
- Responsible for cash, debt, investment and fund management
- Serves as department head.

Mass. General Laws process

- A vote by Town Meeting is required at least 60 days before Annual Election in order to approve the change from elected to appointed Treasurer.
- Once the change is approved by Town Meeting, it requires a vote by a Town wide election.

- If the change is voted in, then the appointing authority for the Town Treasurer would be the Town Administrator.
- The process is affected by the date when the Town voters approve the change.
 - If the Article is not approved at the Spring 2023 Annual Election, the elected Treasurer would remain in that position for three years.
 - If the Article is approved at the Spring 2023 Annual Election, then the elected Treasurer would serve only until a permanent treasurer is appointed.
 - If the Article is not approved at Town meeting until May 2023, then we would need to wait a year until the Annual Election in April 2024, and the elected Treasurer would serve out their term to 2026.

Attorney Paul Kominers from Anderson Kreiger, confirmed that the above process is correct.

Epstein said that, currently the Town Administrator does not have the authority to appoint the staff in the Treasurer's Office. If this change is implemented, then the Town Administrator Act may need to be changed to give the authority to the Town Administrator to appoint the staff of the Treasurer's Office.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jane Shapiro, resident of Belmont stated that she feels that the Treasurer should remain an elected position.

Judith Feinleib, Town Meeting member, pct. 6, said she is opposed to making the Town Treasurer an appointed position. She said the Select Board, Town Treasurer and Town Clerk are elected positions. She said she feels the Collins Center is not speaking to those three positions, but more to the structure and composition of Town committees. She said Belmont cannot afford to pay the wages required to change these positions to appointed offices. She does not want to make the Treasurer position into a bureaucratic position that answers only to the Town Administrator. She pointed out that if we are not able to find a resident with the correct expertise, a recall election could be mounted.

Elizabeth Dionne, Town Meeting member, pct. 2, Warrant Committee member and Chair of the Community Preservation Committee, said she strongly supports the recommendation to change the Treasurer position to an elected position. She feels that the Collins Center identified critical financial problems and if we don't address our structural problems than our fiscal problems will continue to escalate. We have been fortunate to have Floyd Carman as Treasurer, but she thinks it will be difficult to find a Belmont resident with the correct expertise to run for this position. She disagrees that we can handle a recall election without causing severe damage to the Town.

Alison Lenk, Town Meeting member, pct. 8, agreed with Ms. Feinleib's comments that this position should not be an elected office. She feels that we can successfully draw from the educated population in Belmont to elect an eligible person for the Treasurer position.

Judith Ananian-Sarno, Town Meeting member, pct. 3, said that she plans to vote no on this Article. The constituents she has talked to in her precinct want the Town Treasurer to continue to be an elected position. She noted that recently the Light Board governing structure was changed to an elected body and there were qualified candidates who applied for those positions.

Ann Helgen, Town Meeting member, pct. 2, member of the Warrant Committee and Structural Change Impact Group feels that the change to the Treasurer position would produce a broader group of candidates. She disagrees that the Collins Center was referring to only committee members, the report specifically talked about making administrators accountable. She thinks we should put it on the November Warrant in order to put in place the best practices possible. She feels that the issue of independence is overblown. We cannot fix our structural deficit without fixing our governmental structure.

Geoff Lubien, Town Meeting member, pct. 7., and Warrant Committee Chair said we have to evaluate how other municipalities function and 80% of the towns in Massachusetts appoint their Treasurer. The position needs to be modernized. He said no one likes change, but now is the time to start discussing this change. He strongly recommends that we proceed with placing this Article on the November 2022 Warrant especially after two independent bodies (Collins Center and Department of Revenue) have recommended this change.

Garvin said there are currently only six towns in Massachusetts with a population of 15K+ that have elected Treasurers, one of which is Belmont. At least eleven have transitioned from elected to appointed since 2016.

Margaret Callanan, Town Meeting member, pct. 7, said she has not yet made a decision about the change. She asked if the Select Board knew Mr. Carman's point of view on the subject. The Select Board said they cannot speak for Mr. Carman.

Julie Crockett, Town Meeting member, pct. 5, supports the change to appointed Treasurer. It is a small change that would help move the Town in the right direction. She feels that we need to make the decision while we still have an excellent Treasurer in place. She asked if the Town Administrator or Town Treasurer's base salary would increase if this change is implemented.

Patrice Garvin said the Town would undertake a market compensation comparison before the decision about salary is finalized.

Ms. Crockett asked what the Select Board's role would be in the choice of candidate for the position?

Ms. Garvin affirmed that she always solicits the feedback of the Select Board in any appointments made by her office. She confirmed that the decision on appointments is made as a team. A Screening Committee is convened for these types of appointments and usually the committee includes a resident representative and committee members.

Bill Trablucy, Town Meeting member, pct. 7, raised the conspiracy issue that a previous commenter alluded to. Paolillo said that he tries not to pay attention to the conspiracy theories. He thinks that some of these personal issues reflect reticence about change.

Bill Anderson, Town meeting member, pct. 2, and Warrant Committee member said he is a professional in the financial services industry and he thinks that an appointed treasurer will give them opportunity to seek out a wider pool of candidates. But he thinks that more work needs to be done before we bring this change to Town Meeting. He believes that the Collins Report is a mandate to restructure and we need to review all the recommendations made by the Collins Center report and the intent behind those

recommendations before we bring any one change to Town Meeting. Segregation of duties is a key financial management tool and we need to review all recommendations on a larger level.

Jack Weiss, Warrant Committee member, pct. 1, thinks the appointed position will increase the professionalism in the position and increase our candidate choices. The competence of a treasurer affects our Triple A bond rating. However, he noted that we need to build support from residents and he thinks putting it on the Warrant in November could impede its success.

Paolillo said the Select Board would discuss the timing of the Article on November 7th.

Paul Rikter, Town Meeting member, pct. 8, and Warrant Committee member, believes that this Article needs to be placed on the Warrant in November 2022. He thinks that the November Town Meeting will produce a bigger audience and a chance for more valuable discussion.

Judith Feinleib, Town Meeting member, pct. 6, thanked Bill Anderson and Jack Weiss for their feedback. She feels strongly that the Treasurer should continue to report to an elected body, not an appointed official, and she has heard many of her constituents express a similar point of view.

Elizabeth Dionne, Town Meeting member, and Warrant Committee member said she made the remark about the conspiracy theory. She thinks that, unfortunately, a lot of the opposition is specific to Ms. Garvin. Emails are circulating that state opposition in connection with her position. They are worried that the increased authority will result in a request for a salary increase. Ms. Dionne stated that she personally does not feel that Ms. Garvin's salary is too high. She thinks the opposition to giving her the authority to appoint the Treasurer is personal and short sighted. She would like to see the Article be placed on the November 2022 Warrant, but if people think that Town Meeting members need more time, then it would be appropriate to wait on this approval.

Ann Helgen, Town Meeting member, pct. 2, and Warrant Committee member, strongly urges that the Article be placed on the November Warrant to facilitate discussion with a broader population. There is a long list of changes that need to be evaluated and these changes need to be phased in slowly. This is an imminent issue and we cannot let Mr. Carman retire before there is a discussion about the change.

Andrea Pascale, resident and Council on Aging Board member, thinks this issue may turn out to be a difficult change for people to embrace. Opinions need to be heard from the people who are against the position being appointed by the Town Administrator. We need to address the sentiment behind that opposition because it may affect the vote.

Geoff Lubien, Town Meeting member, pct. 7, and Warrant Committee Chair said there are checks and balances in place and the Treasurer cannot appropriate without formal feedback from other departments and the Select Board. He said a very small percentage of towns have the Select Board appoint the Treasurer. Why are we so special? These are about positions, not people. We are trying to establish processes that support financial success and this goal should not be affected by personal opinions.

Judith Feinleib, said that Mike Widmer said at a Select Board meeting that he would prefer to pursue structural changes in Belmont on a broader level. Where is the Select Board on that opinion?

Paolillo said they have not talked about that specifically, but Select Board members have agreed that they need to move on many of the recommendations of the Collins Center. Further discussions will center on when and how the Town will pursue those recommendations.

Bill Anderson asked about next steps.

Paolillo replied that all the November 2022 Articles for the Warrant will be discussed at the November 7th meeting.

Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 3-0.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary

11/7/22